



The challenge of academic-community partnerships: Analyzing divergent perspectives

Linda Ruiz, Lab Manager, Family, Work, Community and Culture Research Group, American University [lindadrui@gmail.com]

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Summary

Despite the de facto geographic integration of academic institutions in communities, cultural and social integration may be much more difficult to establish. In recent years, universities have been making an increased effort to reconnect with their respective communities in order to renew their civic and social commitments. To these ends, academic researchers are more frequently developing collaborations and partnerships with local community-based organizations (CBOs) to begin to bridge the gap between academic theory and social change. For universities these partnerships serve as a means to build relationships with the surrounding community, improve university image, increase funding, and aid in the recruitment and retention of students (Holland & Gelmon, 1998). For community organizations, such

volunteers/staff, and improve chances for receiving and/or maintaining funding. Logically, one would assume that CBOs and researchers would always jump at the chance to work with one another, but this is not necessarily the case. Nyden and Wiewel (1992) describe in detail the standing “love-hate affair” between researchers and community practitioners. In practice successful and enduring partnerships are challenging and all too rare.

Thornton and Jaeger (2008) posit that disparate perspectives between community partners relate to differences in organizational culture. In its traditional usage, the word “culture” denotes the shared beliefs, values, and assumptions of a group of people. In referring to an organizational culture, Thornton and Jaeger make the case that the context in which an organization functions produces a culture and, of particular importance here, an intellectual framework among its members, which is distinct from that of organizations in other contexts.

Utilizing a mixed methods approach, stakeholders in various academic-community partnerships in the Washington, DC area were approached to participate in individual semi-structured interviews and surveys. Guiding research questions related to partnership goals, individual role perceptions, envisioning an ideal partnership, and an individual partnership assessment.

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